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Cormac Burke

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# Love, Family, and Society

by

**The Right Reverend  
Monsignor Cormac Burke**

*The author, a member of Opus Dei, lives in Rome.*

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Western society is going pathological; in many respects it is already quite sick. It is not I who make this drastic diagnosis, but the Pope. In his "Letter to Families" of February 1994, he does not hesitate to say: "our society . . . from various points of view, is a *society which is sick*, and is creating profound distortions in man" (no. 20). Is such a diagnosis exaggerated? I do not think so. Is it pessimistic? Again I would say No, for it is given by a doctor firmly convinced that the patient is made for good health and has the ability to recover, and who himself knows and possesses the right medicine to bring about the cure.

It is a stringent and disturbing diagnosis, certainly, but it is also encouraging. It says that something is wrong, seriously wrong; but shows how it can be put right. The Pope's optimism comes from his conviction and repeated insistence that man is meant for a "civilization of love" (13), while his diagnosis derives from the fact that our western civilization seems to be one not of love but rather, as he puts it, "a civilization of production and of use, a civilization of 'things' and not of 'persons', a civilization in which persons are used in the same way as things are used".<sup>1</sup>

The consequences of a civilization of use, of a consumer-society, are clear. When everything (which includes everyone) becomes an object of use, once the object is no longer found to be useful, the practical thing is to discard it; and if it won't go away, to find ways of getting rid of it. A civilization of use can lead to a "civilization of dumping", of elimination of all that is considered unwanted (an unborn child, for instance). And when the unwanted thing or person cannot be easily eliminated, it can lead to a "civilization" of hatred.<sup>2</sup>

It is love in particular which is in a critical state of pathology today. Not God's love — for it is never in crisis —, but *our* love, which has to be the very dynamism of our being, and yet which can be choked out of us and killed by self-seeking. In a real sense, the West is in danger of death through heart-failure: love-failure. This is the sickness which is gripping western societies, because true human health can only be present in the person who is able to love; and we are forgetting how to love. *There* is the only really important thing in life: to learn to love.

"I have set before you good and evil . . . life and death; therefore *choose* . . ." <sup>3</sup>  
This is the marvel and the burden of our existence, which appears both exciting

and fearful, constantly marked by alternatives and choices. Perhaps as one gets older the possibilities may seem to grow less in number, though certainly not less in importance. The fact is that they are in the end reduced to just two: Heaven or Hell. These are the definitive alternatives, eternal love or eternal hatred. When all is said and done, life is nothing else than a preparation for those ultimate possibilities: to love or no longer to be able to love, to give or no longer to be able to give, to open one's self out towards others, or to remain shrunk within self and closed off from everyone and everything.

Life then, we might say, is a preparatory school, where the one topic that really must be learned is love, where the only bad marks that really matter are in the subject of love, where the only absolute failure is of those who fail to learn to love. And where love has not been learned, the opposite of love — selfishness, and eventually hatred — has every chance of taking over a person's life.

Man is created for love, with an ability, a tendency and a need to love. And yet there is a powerful factor at work inside all of us (Christians call it Original Sin) which makes it difficult to love, and even to understand in practice the true nature of love. Love is above all a matter of knowing and willing; and yet we easily let it depend on feelings. Love means giving, and yet we all tend to be very aware of our right to receive — also from those whom we say we love. Love means generosity, and yet in practice we find it hard to free our love from calculation. Love means sacrifice, and we all want an easy life where the demands made on us are minimal. Love creates bonds of union and understanding between persons, but also duties of support and forgiveness, and we all tend at times to shirk our duties.

Practical selfishness and an impoverished understanding have always been the "normal" obstacles to love, arising within us and between us. Nevertheless, despite these obstacles, love has always found many natural supports — settings, environments, institutions — for its development. The new pathology we are faced with in our society is that these natural institutions themselves, of which marriage and family life are the chief, are ailing and in danger of dying or of being put to death.

Let us go back to the start of Creation. In calling man into existence, God's plan was that he should be conceived in love and grow in love: that his experience of life should be matured in a particular school of love which is the family, constituted by the marital union of man and woman. Through marriage and the family God wishes to send love, and with it goodness, into the world. Wherever love is made present, good acquires that strength of God which conquers the world. God instituted the family to be the first place — the normal "locus" — where love is naturally learned and from which it can spread out to others. It is on this background that the Pope has written his "Letter to Families". His particular concern is that the very notion and reality of the family are being disfigured or lost today. In consequence of man's lack of self-knowledge<sup>4</sup>, "the family too remains an *unknown reality*" (19). He wishes to present the "truth about the family" (no. 18); and asks Christians to understand and echo it.

Family quality and family experience are vital if we are to have healthy individuals and a healthy society, where despite the presence of evil, good is more



strongly present. Whether life for each individual, and for society, turns out to be good or bad, positive or negative, rich in love or dominated by the experience of selfishness, depends fundamentally on the family. In his Letter, the Pope teaches: "the family is placed at the centre of the great struggle between good and evil, between life and death, between love and all that is opposed to love. To the family is entrusted the task of striving, first and foremost, *to unleash the forces of good* . . . Every family unit needs to make these forces their own so that . . . 'the family be strong with the strength of God'."<sup>5</sup>

Let us briefly look at some ways in which marriage and the family are meant to be schools of life and love, remembering that in the school of the family, as in any school, subjects are not learned unless they are taught, the best teacher being always and perhaps only the one who believes in and *lives* what he or she teaches.

### **A) Family Love: the Children as Beneficiaries**

A major point to bear in mind here is that children do not spontaneously fall in love with their parents, or with their brothers or sisters. They have to *learn* to love. Falling in love is an adult or adolescent phenomenon, not one of childhood. It is not spontaneously but in response to the dedication, patience and sacrifice of their parents, that children learn to love them.

If children normally do learn to love, it is fundamentally because they have experienced *being loved* within the natural setting of the family: by their parents in the first place, and perhaps also by their older brothers and sisters. St. Thomas teaches that nothing moves a person to love so much as to know oneself loved (cf. *Summa Theol.* I-II, 26, art. 2). Children who are loved by their parents will learn to love in return. The persevering dedication of their parents to them — also with the "demands" of love — will gradually teach them that love means giving. And, under their parents' constant love and guidance, they too will learn to love each other. Here one sees the colossal privilege of the task of parents. Not only to give life, but also to teach love.

Nothing is more destructive to happiness than the loss of faith in love. It is to let oneself be lured on to the road to hell to permit doubts about the presence or possibility of love in one's life, thinking that one can neither give love nor receive it: I am too selfish to love others, or others are too selfish to love me. Today the temptation (or the beginning of the temptation) is there for many people, and it is strong. I love no one. No one loves me. I cannot find anyone to love; therefore others are not lovable. No one loves me; therefore I am not lovable. Many people spend years trying to fight off such temptations. Those who do not succeed can end their lives in suicide.

The best natural safeguard against these ultimate temptations is the unique experience of living and growing in a family — that place where no one is unloved, not even the most unlovable. Parents tend to love *each* of their children, even, and especially, the worst. Then the children learn that there is a love which is not conditioned on merit, and is not withdrawn because of defects. As they find themselves relying on the support of such a love, they are encouraged to measure up to its challenge, inside and also outside the family. The lessons — on both the natural and the supernatural level — are there in the parable of the Prodigal Son.

Without *some* experience of a father's or, even more especially, of a mother's love, it is difficult to realize the unconditional nature of the love God has for each one of us: "Can a woman forget the child of her womb? And even if she could forget, yet I will not forget you."<sup>6</sup>

Today it is no exaggeration to say that the mission of parents is to *save* love, through a work of incarnation that humanizes it for their children, so that it is not just a word for them, but a reality truly present in their daily lives. It is then that children begin to respond, and can be taught and led to respond. Parents may expect or require obedience and respect of their children; but these will be given poorly or not at all, if not given in response to generous love.

Spouses who have learned to love each other are the best models and first real teachers of their children. So brothers and sisters gradually learn to be generous among themselves, to understand, to forgive, to make up. Then the family really becomes a school that prepares the children for life, in a special way for modern life, where people are running out of patience with one another, where negative judgments are rife, where other person's defects become an obsession, and forgiveness a rarity, where meanness and intolerance seem to be gaining acceptance as a code of social behavior.

Here I would refer in passing to another aspect of family life and experience which has become particularly important today. That is the gradual development of sexual understanding, which tends to unfold naturally as brothers and sisters grow together. One of the reasons why respect between the sexes is being replaced today by suspicions and antagonism is that more and more boys or girls are growing up without the experience of ever having had a sister or brother. In the plan of nature, the family - a real family - appears as a unique school of sexual understanding, offering the one context in which the sexual relationship is not readily disturbed by misdirected desire.

### **B) Family Love; the Spouses as Master-practitioners**

It is in relation to their children that parents ought most clearly to see that love is a challenge calling for generosity and patience. The living out of this concern for their children should reconfirm them in their own experience that falling in love is easy, but standing and growing in love is not.

We have suggested that children do not spontaneously "fall in love" with their parents. But of course the children would not normally be there at all if the parents had not fallen in love with one another. There is a lot of spontaneity to this romantic process of "falling in love" which usually precedes and inspires the decision of a man and a woman to marry. The process is highly sentimental and filled with feeling, tending to idealize the other person and seeing few defects in him or her — for, as is often said, "love is blind". Peculiarly, this seems to be the design of Nature: that "romance", strong in feeling and weak in perception, should lead people to want to bind themselves together in marriage. But the two people who marry are in fact people with defects. Just a few years into marriage, romance tends to fade, defects come more to the foreground, and spontaneous love has to mature into something more deeply understood and willed. That is when the spouses should understand that they have not *yet* truly learned to love.



Then it is that marriage becomes, for them too and first of all, a place of learning, a school of love.

Conjugal love cannot depend just on romance, or on feeling. In his Letter, the Pope says, "Love is true when it creates the good of persons and of communities; it creates that good and *gives* it to others" (14). "Love is demanding . . . Nowadays people need to rediscover this demanding love, for it is the truly firm foundation of the family" (ib.). True love is shown in the words by which the spouses pledge to accept each other, "for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health . . . all the days of my life."<sup>7</sup>

To love truly is to want the good of the other. This no doubt means wanting the other to be better, but it must begin by loving the other *as he or she actually is*; otherwise it is not a real person one professes to love. Marital love has to be that way, as is brought out by the very idea of marital consent which, the Church teaches, is that "act of the will by which a man and a woman, through an irrevocable covenant, mutually *give and accept each other* . . ."<sup>8</sup> Self-giving: this is the Christian personalism indicated by Vatican II: "man can fully discover his true self only in a sincere giving of himself" (GS 24). "Perfection demands that maturity in self-giving to which human freedom is called."<sup>9</sup> Married love is a constant call to self-giving, and that is why, if the challenge it offers is freely answered, it so powerfully leads people to holiness.

"Husbands and wives, love one another", is the message of Scripture.<sup>10</sup> That means: each of you must be more concerned to give to your spouse, than to receive from him or her. Such constant self-giving is the way of Christ, who gave Himself on the Cross. It is also, paradoxically, the way of happiness.

In the end we cannot and should not want to get away from the fact that happiness — also the happiness that marriage promises — is not possible without generosity and sacrifice. Blessed Josemaria Escriva, the Founder of Opus Dei, used often to say that happiness has its roots in the shape of a Cross.<sup>11</sup> It is the rule and apparent paradox of the Gospel: only by "losing" and giving ourselves — the essence of love — can we begin to find ourselves and, even more than ourselves, the happiness we are made for.

No preaching or teaching on marriage will tend to renew married life if it does not reflect this basic truth. As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says: "Following Christ, denying themselves, taking on themselves their own cross, the spouses can 'understand' the original sense of matrimony and live it with the help of Christ, the source of all Christian life."<sup>12</sup>

Human love in marriage, which promises so much happiness, will therefore only reach fulfillment if it is worked at. The Pope says that "this fulfilment represents both a task and a challenge. The task involves the spouses in living out their original covenant" (no. 7), in being faithful to the mutual love they have pledged. This already poses a challenge to each of them with regard to the other. So much depends on how well Christian spouses understand this challenge, and how generously they respond to it.

Marriage is more and more threatened today because of a selfish and impoverished understanding of married love which is so often seen as a means of self-satisfaction, exclusively centered on the individual, and thought of in terms of

getting-taking: “will he or she make me happy?”; or, perhaps rising to a slightly higher level of shared calculation, “will we make each other happy?” That is not true married love, nor is it likely to last.

The Second Vatican Council says that what makes married love “eminently human”, is the fact that it is “an affection between two persons rooted in the will” (GS 49). Love tends to begin on the level of feelings: but it can never mature and become truly deep if it remains on that level (which after all is the surface level of human relations). In order to grow, love must not remain a purely emotional matter: it needs to become a matter of deliberate and voluntary choice. A truly human view of marriage tells a married person, “Love in marriage is a duty as much as a right. Therefore you are not entitled to give up the effort to love even if marriage proves difficult or runs into unforeseen obstacles, least of all if the obstacle is simply your spouse’s unforeseen defects. He or she has the right to be loved with those defects: that is, as the true person he or she is; and you have the duty to love him or her so. That is what genuine love consists in.”

Of course it is not easy for two people to live together for life, in a faithful and fruitful union. It is “easier” for each to live apart, or to unite casually or for a short time, or to avoid having children. It is easier, but not happier; nor does it contribute to their growth as persons. “Non est bonum homini esse solus”, said the Lord in instituting marriage. It is not good for man or woman to live alone, or in successive temporary associations that tend to leave him or her more and more trapped in self-isolation. Married commitment is not an easy endeavor; but, apart from normally being a happy one, it is one that *matures*.

In his Letter, the Pope insists, “Love then is not a utopia: it is given to mankind as a task to be carried out with the help of divine grace” (no. 15). The Pope speaks of “the dangers faced by love”, and adds: “Here one thinks first of all of selfishness . . .” (no. 14). Individual selfishness is the enemy of love; selfishness fostered by our worst defect which is pride. Selfishness and pride have to be fought; if they are not, they destroy love and unity and happiness, and place the soul in eternal danger. Humility is one of the essential weapons for the fight: the humility of constantly asking pardon of God for one’s personal sins; and in married life, the humility especially of asking one’s partner for forgiveness — even if one thinks him or her mainly to blame.

Young people need to be taught that when they marry, they are going to marry someone with defects; and that when they fall in love, if they think that the other person has no defects, they are wrong. Just as they would be wrong if when they begin to discover the other person’s defects, they let themselves think that love is at an end. On the contrary, it is then that love has come to a turning point towards — or away from — maturity.

Blessed Josemaria Escriva’ was a man who helped many married persons to look on their marriage as a direct calling to sanctity. He insisted with them that their love for God was inseparable from their loving one another, and he would help them, with keen psychology, realize what this implied. Talking with a married couple he would often ask, perhaps beginning with the wife, “Do you love your husband?” - “Of course”, she would reply. “Do you love him very much?” - “*Very* much!” “Do you love him with his defects . . . ?” If there were a



moment's hesitation at this, he would add: "because if you don't, you don't love him." Then he would ask the same of the husband.

Therefore when marrying, if one is not prepared to love the other person with his or her defects, it is not, I repeat, a real person that one wants to marry. To learn to love someone with defects is of the essence of true love and loyalty, and is always a major task for spouses. Mutual respect and acceptance — respect of each for the other, defects and all — is the only attitude that holds a couple, a family, a society, together.

### C) Family Love, Family Fruit, Family Vitality

A family is a school of life and of love. But if it does not have a certain minimum vigor, normally expressed also in terms of size, it is not likely that individualism and selfishness — the enemies of life worth living and worth loving — will have much of their sharp edges rubbed off. In his Letter, the Pope insists: "Families today have too little 'human' life. There is a shortage of people with whom to create and share the common good; and yet that good, by its nature demands to be created and shared with others: *bonum est diffusivum sui*: 'good is diffusive of itself'" (no. 10).

The Pope speaks of the beauty of married and family love, the dangers threatening it, and the challenge it must rise to. Mentioning selfishness as the first among "the dangers faced by love", he adds: "Here one thinks . . . not only of the selfishness of individuals, but also of couples . . ." (14). He is speaking about the danger posed to married love not just by reciprocal selfishness in the relation between husband and wife, but by the *shared selfishness* of both in regard to their children: the danger of a couple being calculating in their attitude towards their children. Children are properly the fruit of a couple's love; yet it is a poor love that calculates. Calculated giving, especially in giving life, seldom expresses — or strengthens — true love. Truer love tends to be generous, and generosity tries to avoid thinking in terms of calculation.

So the Pope insists that a special challenge within married life is also posed to *both spouses together*, regarding the possible fruit of their love. "The children born to them — and here is the challenge — should consolidate that covenant, enriching and deepening the conjugal communion of the father and mother."<sup>13</sup>

One should not lose sight of the fact that while limitation of family size may often be a necessity, *it is always a privation*. The deliberate choice to avoid having a child — when such a choice is not *imposed* by economic, social or health restraints — tends not to strengthen mutual love and respect between the spouses, but rather to weaken them. If, as Vatican II says, marriage is a "community of life and love" (GS 48), the reluctance to continue to share life can easily become a reluctance to keep sharing love. And this can lead to a dangerous withdrawing into oneself. Even if a couple are in mutual accord about their decision to practise family limitation (I insist I am speaking of a decision which is *not* imposed on them), they would do well to consider whether there may not be an element of shared selfishness behind it. Selfishness, even if shared, never unites, but rather separates.

Family limitation, when not called for, always implies a conclusion that a



particular life — that of the possible child — is not worthwhile. In consequence, the sense of life itself as the most unique gift is in danger of being lost. “Anti-life” can easily become “anti-love”, and vice-versa. The person who gives way to this mentality is likely to esteem the life of others less, and perhaps eventually to doubt even the worth of his or her own life.<sup>14</sup>

Conjugal love is normally meant to become parental love. This is usually a condition of the maintenance and growth of love.<sup>15</sup> The new *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says: “Married love tends naturally to be fruitful. A child is not something external added to the mutual love of husband and wife, but stems from the very heart of their reciprocal self-gift, of which it is the fruit and fulfilment.”<sup>16</sup>

### **From Married Love to Parental Love to Family Love**

Does marital love develop into family love just because husband and wife become parents *once*? Well, yes: with three you certainly have a family. But if it remains deliberately at that minimum number, it is likely to lack the richness, vigour and personality that God wished the family to be endowed with. In consequence, it will be less strong against forces that undermine it from without, and, being a lesser challenge to those who compose it, will probably also be a lesser source of happiness and fulfilment for them.

In a homily in Washington, on his first trip to the United States, Pope John Paul II reminded parents that “it is certainly less serious to deny their children certain comforts or material advantages than to deprive them of the presence of brothers and sisters, who could help them to grow in humanity and to realize the beauty of life at all its ages and in all its variety.”<sup>17</sup> I would suggest to parents who too easily incline to family limitation, to read the Pope’s reminder in the light of the Vatican II teaching that “children are the *supreme* gift of marriage and contribute to the greatest extent to the *good of the parents* themselves.”<sup>18</sup> It is therefore not only their present children, but also *themselves*, that such parents may be depriving of a singular “good”, of a unique experience of human life, the fruit of love.

Certainly, as the Pope puts it, there is a challenge here to generosity: generosity related both to the children a couple have, as well as to those they have not but perhaps might yet have. It seems to me that this challenge is most easily faced up to and resolved, not in terms of duty or obligation, but according to one’s *sense of values*. Pope Paul VI, in *Humanae Vitae*, says that a sense of values is in fact the very first thing a married couple need to possess if they are to approach family planning correctly.<sup>19</sup> A true scale of human values is somehow lacking in a couple who fail to see that a child is the best acquisition they can make, and the one that most enriches them as well as their present children. Many married couples in the West no longer seem to realize the simple truth that children are the most personalized fruit of their conjugal love: and therefore are the greatest gift they can make to one another, being at the same time God’s gift to both of them, and to the family their love is creating.<sup>20</sup>

Parents with a large family may have a busy time trying to create peace between their sons and daughters; but they will have a fuller human experience

than parents who find themselves in the increasingly difficult situation of trying to keep peace between themselves and an only child. Even if these latter parents manage to achieve some sort of peace, it is not likely to be a loving worthwhile accord based on mutual sacrifice, but a "botherless" peace, bought at the cost of yielding to the child's whims, and not likely to last or to induce respect.

In the family, considered as a school of social values and of mutual respect, the two principal functions of parents are the handling and solution of tensions, and the upholding of values. Some parents cannot combine both functions. The typical "permissive" solution is to resolve tensions by giving way on values. That way nothing is solved: tensions keep on getting worse, and values are more and more lost. Our modern society exemplifies the process.

### Conclusion

In his Letter to Families, the Pope does not pass over the fact that Christ's message on marriage and the family may appear hard from a merely human point of view, above all if it is that of an individualist. But he emphasizes that this message is both beautiful and worthwhile, as well as of the greatest importance to the world around us. He recalls that even the Apostles had a first reaction of surprise and even fear at Our Lord's teaching about the indissoluble nature of the marriage bond; but that "overcoming their initial fears even about marriage and the family, they grew in courage. They came to understand that marriage and family are a true vocation which comes from God himself and is an apostolate: the apostolate of the laity. Families are meant to contribute to the transformation of the earth and the renewal of the world, or creation and of all humanity" (18).

Parents: each of you has to learn to put his or her own small personal concerns into the background; and, together, you have to learn to overcome your own small mutual differences, to forgive and to forget them. You have to raise your hearts — each one of you individually, and both together — to what God, through the Pope, is proposing to you; to what society, without knowing, needs from you; and to what your children, perhaps also without fully realizing it, have the right to expect from you.

Yes, there are difficulties, for each of us suffers from the consequences of Original Sin. We can even say that the family itself suffers from the Fall. It can be, it should be, a great school of love; but it can also be a school where love is learned poorly — almost always because it is taught poorly. In the worst of cases, the family can even be a school where the opposite of love is learned, because the opposite of love is taught. Instead of being a school of love and generosity, it can become a school of calculation and selfishness. It will be as the parents make it. Here is the greatness of the challenge, mission and ideal placed before Christian parents today.

If you dwell on the beauty of your vocation and the nobility and importance of your mission, its difficulties seem much less. And above all, as the Pope repeats, you have God's help: "Do not be afraid of the risks! God's strength is always far more powerful than your difficulties! Immeasurably greater than the evil at work in the world is the power of the Sacrament of Reconciliation . . . Much more



influential than the corruption present in the world is the divine power of the Sacrament of Confirmation . . . And incomparably greater than all is the power of the Eucharist" (Letter, no. 18). Further, the Holy Father insists that married couples have "the 'grace of state' which follows from the Sacrament of Matrimony" (no. 16). Those couples who trust in that — *only* those who trust in that — can succeed. "Life according to the Gospel . . . is beyond man's abilities, [and is] possible only as the result of a gift of God."<sup>21</sup> Look then for God's gifts in prayer and in the Sacraments; and you will find all the strength you need.

Her foundations of humanity are at stake today. Without Christ, and without the Cross of Christ, the Pope said on Good Friday, man "destroys himself". Three days later, on Easter Sunday, he did not hesitate to say that "the family is the principal source of humanity". A strong warning in one assertion, and a strong affirmation of hope in the other.

"Grace builds on nature" is an old theological and spiritual principle. But today so many aspects of the very nature which grace requires, in order to build on, are in danger. To preserve and restore that nature, we need God's help. It is not lacking; least of all to those Christian families which struggle to keep their proper human character, and to fulfill their human and supernatural mission. With the help of divine grace, practicing generous love, overcoming fear of sacrifice and the Cross, they will learn to be true families and, as such, a source of both humanity and salvation for the whole world.

### References

1. *ib.* The Pope in the same passage lists some of the major distortions that can be found in such a society: "In the context of a civilization of use, woman can become an object for man, children a hindrance to parents, the family an institution obstructing the freedom of its members."

2. The reason why our relation with persons is so much more important than our relation with things, is that one can love persons and be loved by persons, while one cannot have a true love for things, and certainly cannot be loved by them.

3. cf. deut: 30. 19, 20.

4. The Pope's Letter is not just about the family; it is first about man. Modern man, the Pope says, does not really know himself: despite "great progress in understanding both the material world and human psychology", man today has largely lost the awareness of what he really is, and so "remains to a great extent, a *being unknown* to himself" (no. 19). All around one can see this loss of the sense of human identity - of what one is; what one's purpose in life is; whether one is free or not; and if one is, whether any purpose or responsibility accompanies one's freedom; whether one is autonomous and self sufficient, or rather made for others or for the State; what sex is about, what sexual identity means; whether therefore marriage and the family have any meaning . . .

5. no. 23. "It is necessary to go back to seeing the family as the sanctuary of life. The family is indeed sacred; it is the place in which life - the gift of God - can be properly welcomed and protected against the many attacks to which it is exposed, and can develop in accordance with what constitutes authentic human growth. In the face of the so called culture of death, the family is the heart of the culture of life: *Centesimus Annus*, no. 39

6. Is. 49. 15.

7. *Ordo Celebrand; Matrimonium*, no. 25

8. Code of Canon Law, c. 1057.

9. *Veritatis Splendor*, no. 17.

10. cfr. Ephes. 5:21-33.

11. cf. *The Forge*, Scepter Press, New York. 1990, no.28.
  12. no. 1615.
  13. no. 7. He adds: "When this does not occur, we need to ask if the selfishness which lurks even in the love of man and woman as a result of the human inclination to evil is not stronger than this love."
  14. A recent psychiatric investigation coming from Norway is worthy of note. Based on a study of more than one million women, it concludes that "parenthood is an important factor in suicide prevention, and further that the suicide protection offered by children increases with the number of children": "Suicide among Women related to Number of Children in Marriage": *Archives of General Psychiatry*, vol. 50 (1993), p. 137.
  15. Here one could bear in mind the strong words the Pope uses in relation to abortion: "If an individual is exclusively concerned with "use", he can reach the point of killing love by killing the fruit of love. For the culture of use, the "blessed fruit of your womb" (Lk 1:42) becomes in a certain sense an 'accursed fruit'." Letter, no. 21.
  16. no. 2368
  17. *Insagnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, II, 2 (1979), p. 702.
  18. *Gaudium et spes*, no. 50.
  19. *Humanae Vitae*, no. 21.
  20. "All propaganda and misinformation directed at persuading couples that they must limit their family to one or two children should be steadfastly avoided, and couples that generously choose to have large families are to be supported." John Paul II; Message to UN Population Fund Director, Mar. 18, 94 (*Osservatore Romano*, English Edition, Mar. 23, p.2)
  21. *Veritatis Splendor*, no. 23.
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